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What do Project GLOBE's cultural dimensions reflect? An empirical perspective

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There is an ongoing controversy about what Project GLOBE's cultural dimensions measure. GLOBE's work has been criticized by various authors, most recently by McCrae and associates, who view some of GLOBE's scales as unfounded national stereotypes. Further, GLOBE has disregarded the difference between personal values and prescribed norms for others. This paper validates some of GLOBE's dimensions empirically. However, at least two – humane orientation and performance orientation – do not generate convincing nomological networks.

Keywords: cultural dimensions; national stereotypes; norms; practices; Project GLOBE; values

During the 1990s, Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) carried out a large-scale cross-cultural study in 62 societies across the world. After surveying about 17,000 middle managers, the authors published an impressive book, edited by House *et al.* (2004) in which they describe the results of their work. One of the main findings is that there exist nine cultural dimensions. Each of them is presented in two variants: society as it is; and society as it should be, according to the respondents. Thus, one could speak of $9 \times 2 = 18$ dimensions, although the high correlations between some of these dimensions raises the question of whether all of them are really needed to explain GLOBE's data. The Appendix at the end of this article provides GLOBE's sample items, selected by GLOBE among those that were used to measure each dimension.

The publication of GLOBE's book triggered an exchange of opinions, defined by Ronald Fischer, associate editor of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, as 'one of the most heated and controversial debates in contemporary cross-cultural management research' (Fischer 2009, p. 26). In the same publication Fischer states that the continuing debate on what GLOBE measured and how it was measured indicates that these issues are of importance for both management researchers and practitioners.

The debate may not have been so fierce had the GLOBE authors not presented their dimensions as improvement on Hofstede's (2001) five-dimensional model. Critiques of Hofstede's work are frequent in GLOBE's book (see, for example, Ashkanasy *et al.* [2004, p. 313], Sully de Luque and Javidan [2004, pp. 609, 627], etc.). These critiques often imply quite clearly that Hofstede failed to measure properly what he thought he was measuring and that GLOBE has provided the necessary corrective.

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Hofstede (2006) was quick to respond to GLOBE's criticisms. He showed that a factor analysis of GLOBE's data suggests five independent dimensions, not nine, let alone eighteen. He argued that some of GLOBE's measurements capture phenomena that are simply different from his concepts, despite the homonymous names. Hofstede also indicated that the minds of GLOBE's respondents had produced dimensions that were quite different from the researchers' initial conceptualizations.

Javidan *et al.* (2006) fired back at Hofstede, stating that he is ignorant of modern research methods. However, the criticisms of GLOBE did not end. They range from subtle (Peterson 2004, Peterson and Castro 2006), to more pronounced (Fischer 2009, Smith 2006), to dismissive (McCrae *et al.* 2008). The latter authors argue that some of GLOBE's practices-based dimensions (society as it is) do not correlate well with the aggregate national measurements of Big-Five personality traits to which they should correspond. Consequently, some of GLOBE's practices scales measure unfounded national stereotypes: impressionistic laymen's views of their fellow citizens that cannot be objectively confirmed in any way. This complete dismissal of some of GLOBE's dimensions is a serious issue, as it comes from the world's most renowned experts in personality traits and personality differences across modern nations, who can hardly be suspected of ignorance of modern research methods.

As the debate about GLOBE is still alive, the purpose of the present paper is to draw the reader's attention to some of the undisputable contributions that GLOBE has made as well as the pitfalls that its researchers have failed to notice. We will leave out the leadership and organizational behaviour section of GLOBE's work, as it is not part of the ongoing controversy. This paper will focus on GLOBE's societal dimensions. We will provide empirical validations of those dimensions, which is what Smith (2006) recommends. Noting that asking respondents to report their perceptions of others in their society may be problematic, he adds that 'the best test of the magnitude of this problem is provided by comparing correlations between practices scores and independently available nation-level criteria' (p. 917). That should help arrive at some conclusions as to what these perceptions actually measure. However, we are not going to limit this correlation analysis to GLOBE's practices indices but will extend it also to their 'should-be' indices.

The most important question is not whether GLOBE's dimensions predict what external reviewers, such as McCrae *et al.* (2008), expect them to predict. GLOBE's dimensions are not meant to reflect personality traits, despite the fact that the wordings of some GLOBE items are reminiscent of items in Big Five personality traits questionnaires. The main question is whether GLOBE's dimensions predict what they are supposed to, in the view of GLOBE's authors. Another important question is whether they tap any other phenomena. Even if GLOBE's dimensions do not live up to some of their authors' expectations, they could be useful if they predict some interesting variables outside the scope of GLOBE's initial conceptualizations. These are the main issues that we will address in this study. Along the way, we will also dwell on some of the criticisms that the work of GLOBE has generated.

Measures of real practices or unfounded national stereotypes?

GLOBE produced two types of dimensions. Those of the first type were obtained after asking the respondents to describe some prevalent practices and personality traits in their societies. The second set of dimensions were based on the respondents views of what 'should be'; that is, their concepts of an ideal society.

McCrae *et al.* (2008) base their criticism of GLOBE's practices scores on the finding that when respondents are asked to characterize the average personality traits of their fellow citizens, the resulting generalizations do not correlate with self-descriptions (McCrae *et al.* 2007). For that reason, these authors have claimed that respondents' descriptions of their fellow citizens are actually nothing but national character stereotypes (NCS) that do not contain even a kernel of truth (McCrae *et al.* 2007).

A very important question in this debate is why self-descriptions should be more meaningful than generalized descriptions of others. How do we know that it is the former, not the latter, that are less meaningful? Obviously meaningfulness needs to be defined. One criterion proposed by McCrae *et al.* (2007), is associated with the country clusters that a given research method produces. Self-descriptions result in clear geographical constellations: for instance German-speakers tend to cluster together, as do English-speakers, East Europeans, East Asians, etc. In contrast, NCS produce scrambled configurations of nations. In the view of McCrae *et al.* (2007), if nations that do not share any obvious historical and cultural heritage end up in one and the same cluster, the results cannot be explained by any evident logic and the research methodology must be flawed. If this criterion is used, some of GLOBE's results are meaningful, while others are not. As noted by Hofstede (2006) and McCrae *et al.* (2007), when respondents are asked simple questions about salient features of their cultures that they are familiar with, such as family-related issues, they might provide answers that make sense. The results create recognizable cultural clusters. Even more important, they can be validated through correlations with external variables, which is probably the ultimate test of meaningfulness.

When the questions refer to issues that laymen cannot be expected to be knowledgeable about, be they mean personality traits (e.g. how kind the average American is), subtle values (e.g. the average importance of leisure in American society) or generalized practices (e.g. how often the average American gets drunk or the average annual consumption of cigarettes per 100,000 inhabitants), it is likely that the answers will not be valid. They will produce variables and dimensions that cannot be corroborated through correlations with external variables.

Smith (2006) quotes research that illustrates the differences between results from generalized descriptions and self-reports. Asked to guess how important the values in the Schwartz Values Survey are to their fellow citizens, respondents are correct about some values and completely wrong about others; their guesses are far from the self-reports.

Even without any comparisons with external variables, the work of GLOBE presents conclusive internal evidence that their practices scores cannot be fully reliable. GLOBE has published two sets of data for South Africa: from white and black respondents. White and black South Africans often provide widely divergent descriptions of the practices in their country. In fact, the two South Africas – as described by whites and by blacks – sometimes end up in different bands in the GLOBE rankings. According to GLOBE, different bands imply meaningfully different scores (Hanges *et al.* 2004, p. 220). In the rankings for performance orientation, future orientation, power distance, gender egalitarianism, in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism, the two descriptions of South Africa are in different bands. In the humane orientation ranking, the two South Africas, as described by whites and by blacks, are two bands apart. Whom should we believe – the whites or the blacks – and why?

It would be all too simple to assume that whites have described white South African society whereas blacks have described black society. This cannot explain why blacks give South Africa higher scores on two dimensions that measure aspects of formal Western order and a tendency to plan for the future: uncertainty avoidance practices and future

orientation practices. Is black South African society really more oriented toward Western order and planning?

Hypotheses

On the basis of the existing analyses of GLOBE, we make the following hypotheses concerning the validation of GLOBE’s ‘as is’ dimensions through correlations with external variables:

- 1. In-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, and power distance will be validated because GLOBE’s items for these dimensions reflect concepts that respondents can be expected to be knowledgeable about: family relationships; gender relationships; and power distribution.
- 2. Humane orientation and assertiveness will not be validated because the items for these dimensions ask the respondents to provide generalized descriptions of average personality traits; a method that has been shown to result in unfounded national stereotypes.

We refrain from making hypotheses about the other ‘as is’ dimensions.

In-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation ‘as is’

GLOBE’s in-group collectivism, future-orientation and uncertainty avoidance practices scores tend to create a contrast between rich and poor countries, which suggests differences related to wealth versus poverty and hence of individualism versus collectivism in the sense of the terminology used in Hofstede (2001). Minkov (2007) extracted a very similar dimension from the World Values Survey (WVS, 2006) database. He called that dimension exclusionism versus universalism but admitted that it is simply a variant of national-level collectivism versus individualism. All these dimensions are intercorrelated as shown in Table 1). The first element of our first hypothesis was correct: GLOBE’s in-group collectivism is validated through high correlations with external variables.

The high correlations suggest that Hofstede’s individualism versus collectivism, Minkov’s exclusionism, GLOBE’s in-group collectivism practices and GLOBE’s uncertainty avoidance practices are variants of one and the same dimension. Future orientation also gravitates in the same direction, although the evidence is less clear (but note its very high correlation with GLOBE’s uncertainty avoidance practices, meaning that they are almost undistinguishable). All these dimensions, with the possible exception of the future orientation facet of GLOBE’s uncertainty avoidance, capture one and the same syndrome: high importance of in-groups and a relative lack of interest in out-groups in the poor world, versus a

Table 1. Correlations between four cultural dimensions that reflect differences between Western countries and the developing world.

	EXC	COLL	UNC	FUT
IND	– .74** (n = 40)	– .81** (n = 46)	.53** (n = 46)	.34* (n = 46)
EXC		.85** (n = 39)	– .59** (n = 39)	– .40* (n = 39)
COLL			– .57** (n = 61)	– .42* (n = 61)
UNC				.76** (n = 61)

Note: IND = individualism (Hofstede 2001); EXC = exclusionism (Minkov 2007); COLL = GLOBE’s in-group collectivism practices; UNC = GLOBE’s uncertainty avoidance practices; FUT = GLOBE’s future orientation practices.

lack of clear boundaries between in-groups and out-groups in the rich Western countries, as well as equitable, universalist treatment of everybody, based on who they are as individuals, not to which group they belong. (For the association between national wealth and these cultural traits, see Hofstede [2001], Hofstede *et al.* [2010], Minkov [2007].) GLOBE's uncertainty avoidance has nothing to do with Hofstede's homonym. GLOBE's homonymous dimension measures the degree to which a country has accepted some aspects of formal Western order that are necessary to ensure equitable treatment of and respect for the interests of all individuals. Western cultures are very serious about this foundation of what they call order; therefore, they have stringent formal rules to protect it. In contrast, the cultures in the poor collectivist countries resist this particular aspect of Western order and breed nepotism, racism, discrimination, corruption, consumer fraud, human rights abuses and violation of traffic regulations and all rules that are based on the Western principle of tolerance and respect for all (Minkov 2007). As Triandis (2000, p. 29) has put it, 'people in collectivist cultures are extremely supportive of their ingroup members, but they have a cold, and even hostile, relationship with outgroup members'. This explains why Western order is impossible in a strongly collectivist society.

How well has GLOBE measured the Western order facet of individualism versus collectivism? Relatively well, it seems, but it is hard to be more specific. Asking respondents about the degree of formal order in the practices of their societies or about future orientation is a more difficult task than asking them if people are family-oriented. Consider these items that measure GLOBE's uncertainty avoidance: 'In this society, orderliness and consistency are stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation' (sample item in Sully de Luque and Javidan [2004, p. 619]); 'In this society, most people lead highly structured lives with few unexpected events' (GLOBE 2006, item 1-16). How are middle managers supposed to tackle these items without being sociologists or social psychologists with considerable research experience? If we, the authors of this article, were asked to describe our own society in this way, we would answer that we have no idea, despite all the literature that we have read about our own culture. We simply cannot recall a study that addresses these issues.

Institutional collectivism 'as is'

One of the sample items for this dimension (Gelfand *et al.* 2004) suggests that it measures group loyalty. However, as noted by the same authors, the dimension is uncorrelated with GLOBE's in-group collectivism. It obviously has nothing to do with it. The nomological network (external variables that correlate with the construct of interest and validate it) provided by GLOBE consists overwhelmingly of weak or insignificant correlations. This is not surprising, in view of the wording of some of the items that were used to measure this dimension: 'The economic system in this society is designed to maximize: individual interests/collective interests' (Gelfand *et al.* 2004, p. 464). Even professors of economics will have trouble answering this question and their answers are likely to be motivated by their political convictions. As a result, institutional collectivism practices seems to be a dimension that measures mostly itself.

Gender egalitarianism 'as is'

The name of this dimension indicates clearly what it should measure but its nomological network in Emrich *et al.* (2004) is unconvincing. According to GLOBE's data, it is uncorrelated with measures of gender stereotypes and gender role ideologies and yields

weak correlations with statistics such as women's economic activity, women's purchasing power and percentage of women in government. Although the dimension may be based on a kernel of truth, its scores are far from being a good estimate of relative gender egalitarianism differences across GLOBE's sample of countries. The second element of our first hypothesis is not confirmed.

Power distance 'as is'

GLOBE's authors (Carl *et al.* 2004) report high correlations between this dimension and three other measurements of the same construct, including Hofstede's. This is sufficient to conclude that GLOBE's power distance practices is a meaningful dimension. This is hardly a surprise considering the sample items that GLOBE has provided. They ask the respondents whether followers in their society are expected to obey their leader without question and whether power is concentrated at the top (Carl *et al.* 2004). It would be very strange indeed if middle managers did not have an accurate perception of these issues as they deal with them on a daily basis. The third element of our first hypothesis is confirmed.

Performance orientation 'as is'

According to GLOBE (Javidan 2004), this dimension is a modest predictor of several composite variables from external sources: IMD's world competitiveness index; government support for prosperity; societal support for competitiveness; societal health; and general satisfaction. We have been able to verify only the last of these. The performance orientation practices scores are not significantly correlated with average satisfaction with life (World Values Survey 2006, item A171): $r = .08$, $p < 0.58$, $n = 47$.

GLOBE expects this dimension to predict a number of other variables. Some of those are economic prosperity, strong education, a belief in individual success when one tries hard enough, a monochronic approach to time and a sense of urgency, a perception that individuals are in control, competitiveness and materialism, and a relatively low importance of family relationships (Javidan 2004). These are the variables that can easily be tested as they have been measured in other studies. GLOBE's authors have made also other predictions that are harder to verify.

The performance orientation practices scores correlate with mean disagreement that hard work results in a better life (World Values Survey 2006, item E040) at $-.40$ ($p = .04$, $n = .28$), which is consistent with what GLOBE expects.

On the other hand, by GLOBE's own admission, the performance orientation practice scores are weakly correlated with national wealth (Javidan 2004); therefore they are not a good predictor of that variable. They yield insignificant and weak correlations (close to 0) with the following variables: GDP per person growth from 1970 to 2005 (calculated on the basis of data in UN Statistics Division [2007a], quoting World Bank data, former communist countries excluded as they had a forcibly distorted economic regime and no reliable statistics, $n = 48$), overall achievement in math and science in the 8th grade in the TIMSS 2003 studies (Mullis *et al.* 2005, Martin *et al.* 2004), agreement that success depends on external factors (Pew Research Center [2002, q 17b], mostly nationally representative samples), average perceptions of personal life control (World Values Survey [2006, item A173], latest data for each country, mostly from 1998–2000), high importance of family (World Values Survey 2006, item A001), achievement and initiative as work goals (World Values Survey 2006, items C018, C016), pace of life

items (walking speed, postal clerk speed, and clock accuracy in Levine and Norenzayan [1999]).

The performance orientation practices scores are a negative predictor of average approval of interpersonal competition (World Values Survey 2006, item E039), contrary to what GLOBE expects: $r = -.32$, $p < .04$, $n = 42$.

In summary, GLOBE's performance orientation practices scores do not predict most of what they should. Further, they produce scrambled geographical configurations. The meaningfulness and utility of this dimension is far from proven. Rather, it may well reflect the respondents' lack of understanding of the items that define it and their tendency to produce unfounded national stereotypes, at least in the case of some countries.

Humane orientation 'as is'

According to GLOBE, in high humane orientation societies 'others are important (i.e. family, friends, community, strangers)' and 'values of altruism, benevolence, kindness, love and generosity have high priority' (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004, table 18.1, p. 570). The same authors quote strong correlations between this dimension and variables such as birth-to-date rates and attributing an economic value to children. It is unclear what these have to do with the authors' definition of humane orientation, despite their attempts to see a conceptual link. The fact that this dimension is a modest predictor of percentages of labour force in agriculture (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004) is also hard to interpret.

Humane orientation practices predict lower consumption of alcohol (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004). There is a plausible, yet unproven, assumption here that alcohol consumption is boosted by inhumane relationships between people.

Turning to more easily interpretable variables, this dimension is a positive predictor of racism, or more precisely unwillingness to have people of another race as neighbours (World Values Survey 2006, item A125): $r = .41$, $p < .004$, $n = 46$. It is an even better predictor of agreement that poor people are lazy (World Values Survey 2006, item E131): $r = .58$, $p < .001$, $n = 28$. This is inconsistent with GLOBE's expectations but it is in full agreement with Kabasakal and Bodur's (2004) report that humane orientation practices predict a right-wing political orientation. GLOBE's authors have tried to deal with this paradox by explaining the opposite: why low humane-oriented societies prefer left-wing ideologies. However this does not explain why supposedly high humane-oriented societies demonstrate the opposite preference. Do Zambia, the Philippines, Ireland, Malaysia, Thailand, Egypt, Indonesia, Ecuador, Albania and India – the 10 highest scorers on this dimension – have such an excess of welfare programs that their highly humane-oriented populations are fed up and wish to see a reduction?

Further, this dimension is not significantly correlated with a number of items in the World Values Survey (2006) that it can be expected to predict: rejection of foreigners or homosexuals as neighbours (items A129 and A1320); importance of service to others (item A007); tolerance and respect for others as a quality that children should learn (item A035); and concern for mankind (item E158). It is uncorrelated with any of the helping behaviour variables in Levine *et al.* (2001) and with official foreign development assistance rates in 2005 (OECD 2006) or in any other year.

Amnesty International (2009) has grouped all countries into four categories with respect to the death penalty: 1 – completely abolished; 2 – abolished for ordinary crimes; 3 – not abolished, although not applied recently; 4 – retained and applied. When these

four values are assigned to countries, they form a variable that is positively correlated with humane orientation practices: $r = .35$, $p < .06$, $n = 60$. Thus, higher humane orientation predicts a somewhat higher likelihood that a particular country is closer to the retentionist position on the death penalty scale.

One can only wonder what is so humane about some of the characteristics of this dimension: racism and a tendency to execute offenders. Of course, it is possible to argue that humane orientation is about other concepts, not these. But, again, we have a dimension that fails to predict much of what GLOBE expects and it does not have a convincing nomological network. McCrae *et al.* (2007) seem to be right. This dimension seems to capture unfounded national stereotypes. The first element of our second hypothesis is confirmed: humane orientation measures unfounded national stereotypes.

Assertiveness 'as is'

GLOBE (Hartog 2004) has not provided any convincing external validation for this dimension. All quoted correlations are weak at best or insignificant.

Among other things, societies that score higher on this construct should have sympathy for the strong. They should value competition, initiative, and expressiveness and revealing of thoughts and feelings. They should have a belief that anyone can succeed if he or she tries hard enough and that individuals are in control. The opposite pole of the dimension should predict the opposite, plus equality and thinking of others as inherently worthy of trust (Hartog 2004). Other predictions have also been made but these are the ones that are relatively easy to verify with World Values Survey items.

The assertiveness practices scores are negatively correlated with agreement that poor people are lazy (World Values Survey 2006, item E131): $r = -.42$, $p < .03$, $n = 28$. More assertive cultures show more sympathy for poor people, not less.

The same scores are insignificantly correlated with the following items in the World Values Survey (2006): average perceptions of personal life control (item A173); mean approval of interpersonal competition (item E039); mean agreement or disagreement that hard work results in a better life (item E040); preference for the expression of one's own preferences in order to achieve good human relationships (A169); and achievement and initiative as work goals (items C018 and C016). GLOBE's assertiveness practices scores are also uncorrelated with agreement or disagreement that success depends on external (not personal) factors (Pew Research Center 2002, q 17b), with the percentages of respondents who would not show feelings at work (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1999, fig. 6.1), and with agreement or disagreement that it is sometimes necessary to use military force (Pew Research Center 2007, q 22g).

Still, one of GLOBE's predictions seems to be validated. The assertiveness practices scores are a negative predictor of item E131 in the World Values Survey (2006), which asks the respondents if they feel that others treat them fairly: $r = -.58$, $p < .01$, $n = 21$). Item A165, which asks if most people can be trusted, also yields a significant correlation in the expected direction, albeit weak: $r = -.38$, $p < .01$, $n = 46$.

It appears that GLOBE and the World Values Survey used very similar methods. In both cases respondents were asked to describe their collective perceptions of others in the same society. Hence the similarity of the results, which suggests that GLOBE's assertiveness practices probably measure mistrust of others. The second element of our second hypothesis is confirmed in the sense that this dimension measures stereotypical perceptions of national assertiveness.

Measures of personal values or societal norms for others?

Throughout GLOBE's book, the authors repeat that their as-should-be scales measure values. However, these are not values in the sense of the World Values Survey or the work goals in the IBM questionnaire that Hofstede used. In those studies, the items that measure values or work goals ask the respondents what is important to them *in their personal lives*. GLOBE asked their respondents to state what should be important in society, which was obviously interpreted as what should be important *to other people*. There can be a tremendous difference between the values that people hold personally and those that they wish to see in other people. Smith (2006) has explained this difference briefly, yet clearly. Here, we will go a little deeper into this extremely important issue.

A religious person who has espoused religion as a personal value might want everybody else to share his religiousness. But if you value power you would want others to be submissive, not to compete with you for power. Similarly, a man who is involved in sexual networking, and obviously values unrestrained sex, would not gain anything if other men shared the same personal value. In fact, he is much better off advocating restraint for them, so as to minimize the competition for women in which he is involved. Corrupt business people do not gain anything either if their competitors are also corrupt. As far as they are concerned, corruption should be allowed only when they are involved in it.

It is crucial to see the difference between these two concepts: 'values for me' and 'values for others'. To differentiate between them, we will use the term 'values' for the former, but will call the latter 'norms'. The term 'norm' appears to have been used in this sense by Bond *et al.* (2004) with reference to one of the items that Inglehart and Baker (2000) used to extract one of their cultural dimensions.

Hofstede (2001, 2006) seems to distinguish values from norms by speaking of 'values as the desired' and 'values as the desirable', and explicitly criticized GLOBE for failing to see this distinction (Hofstede 2006). Although Hofstede's conceptualization of 'the desired' versus 'the desirable' is not worded exactly in the same way as our explanation of 'values' versus 'norms', we are largely in agreement about these concepts and the differences that they entail (Hofstede, personal communication, 2008).

A failure to distinguish between values and norms explains, for example, the frequent misunderstandings of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension. One of the items that he used to extract that dimension asks whether the respondents agree that rules should never be broken (Hofstede 2001). Many have taken this to mean that the highest-scoring countries on uncertainty avoidance, those in Southern and Latin Europe, should have the most rule-abiding citizens in the world, not only in their statements but also in practice. Some of GLOBE's authors (Sully de Luque and Javidan 2004) have also made this false assumption. Criticizing Hofstede, they quote French scholar d'Iribarne as indicating that although French people profess higher rule orientation than Americans, the real situation is the opposite. They also quote Schramm-Nielsen who, 'contrary to expectations' (Sully de Luque and Javidan 2004, p. 627), found that French respondents did not report that they refrain from bending or breaking company rules, whereas the Danish respondents were more likely to actually obey the rules. GLOBE's authors use this as evidence that there must be something wrong with Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance, particularly with its rule-orientation facet.

There are abundant examples showing that norms do not need to reflect behaviours. The Transparency International database makes it clear that Southern and Latin Europe (high scores on Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance and rule orientation as a norm) has

considerably higher corruption levels than Northern Europe (low uncertainty avoidance and rule orientation as a norm), despite the fact that corruption is illegal everywhere. Apparent paradoxes of this type seem perplexing but are easily explained if one understands that norms sometimes have nothing to do with personal values and behaviours. The fact that I tell you that I advocate rule orientation in general absolutely does not mean that I am rule-oriented myself. Such an assumption is naive. My personal philosophy may well be that others should observe all sorts of rules that I should be allowed to break. For this reason, Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension does not tell us anything about how rule-abiding a particular society is. It predicts the existence of a lot of rules *for others*, not that the rules will be observed.

Asking respondents to describe how they wish to see other people behave is a dangerous method precisely because of the misinterpretations and false expectations that it can create. For example, the correlations between mean approval of bribes (World Values Survey 2006, item F117) and the Transparency International corruption indices since 1999 are consistently about 0. Note that studies of corruption do not simply ask the respondents to generalize the situation in their country (which would be similar to GLOBE's study of practices). They also ask how often the respondents have been required to pay for what government officials should provide freely. In that sense, studies of corruption measure something real.

Misleading as the information from studies of norms can be, GLOBE further complicated the issue by presenting some items in a confusing format. Consider the following question that should measure future orientation norms (society as it should be): 'I believe that people who are successful should: plan ahead/take life events as they occur' (Ashkanasy *et al.* 2004, p. 302). What is probably meant by this question is 'I believe that in order to be successful people should plan ahead (or take life events as they occur)'. But what GLOBE asked was how people who are already successful should behave, which is not at all the same. It is quite plausible that people in some societies believe that planning ahead is necessary for success, but after success has been achieved, it is acceptable to sit back and simply enjoy life as it comes.

In view of this, we will refrain from making any hypotheses about the validation of GLOBE's 'should be' dimensions. There is no reason to assume that when people are asked to describe an ideal society, their answers will not reflect something that can be validated through correlations with external variables. However, we suspect that the wording of some of GLOBE's items may have given the respondents difficulty. Consequently, some of their answers may be hard to interpret.

In-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and future orientation 'as should be'

The in-group collectivism norms scores are weakly and insignificantly correlated with Hofstede's (2001) measure of individualism and with Minkov's (2007) measure of exclusionism. They may be meaningful as a measure of something else, that has not been studied well so far, but they do not reflect what Hofstede and Minkov have measured.

The uncertainty avoidance and future orientation norms are highly correlated. They are negatively correlated with Hofstede's individualism and highly and positively correlated with Minkov's exclusionism. All these correlations are in the $\pm .60$ to $\pm .83$ range. This means that people in the poor collectivist world wish to see their fellow citizens be more orderly and orientated toward planning. This is not a surprising finding. The data in McCrae *et al.* (2007) show clearly that respondents in poor collectivist countries see their fellow citizens as less oriented toward order and deliberation than the respondents of the

rich individualist countries. They seem to want more Western order and predictability in the behaviour of others. This is logical, given the fact that people in collectivist countries are normally less concerned about out-groups than people in individualist countries and often treat them with neglect, disrespect or even hostility (Minkov 2007, Triandis 2000). But this does not mean that they are prepared to adopt the behaviours that they prescribe to others.

If these GLOBE dimensions are correctly interpreted in this way, they are quite meaningful and provide valuable cross-cultural information.

Institutional collectivism ‘as should be’

GLOBE (Gelfand *et al.* 2004, table 16.9, p. 9) reports a negative correlation of $-.55$ between this dimension and Hofstede’s individualism, as well as a correlation of $.52$ with a measurement of family ties strength. This is enough to conclude that this dimension is a variant of individualism versus collectivism.

Gender egalitarianism ‘as should be’

GLOBE (Emrich *et al.* 2004) has not validated this dimension convincingly. However, the scores are positively correlated with female-to-male earned income (UN Development Program 2007/2008): $r = .57, p = .000, n = 51$, and with percentages of women in the adult labor force (UN Statistics Division 2007b): $r = .52, p = .000, n = 55$. There can be no doubt that GLOBE has measured something real in this case and has done that well.

Power distance ‘as should be’

There is no reason to suspect that when people express their preferences concerning power sharing in their society, the answers would not reflect their real wishes. GLOBE (Carl *et al.* 2004) reports a negative correlation between the practices and norms scores. This suggests that members of societies where high power distance is perceived would like to see a reduction of it. This is very useful information for leaders, even if the dimension could not be used for other purposes.

Other than that, it is unclear what the norms scores mean and why the highest scorers should form such an amalgamation of rich and poor, culturally diverse countries, tens of thousands of miles apart: South Africa; New Zealand; Albania; Bolivia; Hong Kong; and Egypt.

Performance orientation ‘as should be’

The scores for this dimension do not predict any of the variables discussed under the performance orientation practices section, except for a weak correlation with life control (World Values Survey 2006, item A173): $r = .35, p < .017, n = 46$. They yield a negative Spearman correlation with GDP growth from 1970 to 2005: $-.42, p < .003, n = 48$ (the former communist countries are excluded). This is precisely the opposite of what the dimension should predict. The conclusion is the same as for the performance orientation practices dimension: no clear meaning can be assigned to it. When people state that their society should be performance oriented, that does not necessarily have any practical consequences.

Humane orientation 'as should be'

GLOBE's authors (Kabasakal and Bodur 2004) report that this dimension predicts lower incarceration rates. It is also a negative, yet almost weak, predictor of agreement that poor people are lazy (World Values Survey 2006, item E131): $r = -.41, p < .032, n = 28$. It is uncorrelated with death penalty practices, foreign assistance or WVS items that measure racism, rejection of foreigners, and tolerance and respect for others. It is also uncorrelated with agreement or disagreement that it is sometimes necessary to use military force (Pew Research Center 2007, q 22 g). The totality of this evidence is inconclusive but, pending further research, it is probably safer for the time being to refrain from using GLOBE's scores for this dimension for the purpose of validation of other constructs.

Assertiveness 'as should be'

The scores for this dimension predict agreement that poor people are lazy (item E131 in the World Values Survey [2006]): $r = .55, p < .002, n = 28$ and are negatively correlated with complete agreement that the government should take care of the poor (Pew Research Center 2007, q. 22b): $r = -.45, p < .017, n = 28$, as well as with disagreement that hard work results in a better life (World Values Survey 2006, item E040): $r = -.51, p = .006, n = 28$. They are positively correlated with agreement that people treat the respondent fairly (World Values Survey 2006, item A166): $r = .51, p < .018, n = 21$. This evidence is sufficient to validate the dimension: it reflects a belief in a fair and equitable world where one gets what one deserves and should not be given much help in the case of failure. The dimension scores do not predict expressiveness or perceptions of life control and success control, agreement that military force is sometimes necessary, or a desire for initiative or achievement as a work goal, but that does not reduce its meaningfulness. It obviously does not stand for many of the things that GLOBE believes it should be about. Nevertheless, it does capture one of the predicted facets in a convincing way.

Implications

If it is interpreted correctly, GLOBE's work contains crucially important lessons for the cross-cultural field, students of international business and social science in general. Some of them should be mentioned in any handbook on cross-cultural differences. Leaving apart the important findings concerning leadership and organizational behaviour issues, some of the key lessons to be drawn from GLOBE's work are the following:

1. Asking ordinary respondents to describe their societies or their fellow citizens produces meaningful results only when the discussed issues are very salient and very simple, such as some types of relationships within families. More abstract questions have the potential to result in purely impressionistic answers that can reflect unsupported stereotypes.
2. It is hard, perhaps impossible, to decide before the study which questions are simple and which are not. It appears that even gender issues – a topic that ordinary respondents could be expected to be knowledgeable about – are not well understood and ordinary people are not fully familiar with the real situation in their countries. This means that asking people to describe their societies and the fellow citizens who live in them is not a sound research method. To be on the safe side, it should never be used, even if the items target seemingly simple issues, unless the research goal is to study stereotypes.

3. Research questions about norms are also controversial. It is impossible to know before the study whether the respondents accept the norms as personal values or only prescribe them to others while hoping for an exemption. Only an analysis after the study could potentially reveal which is the case and what a norms-based dimension means. Studies and interpretations of norms make sense only when the researchers are fully aware of the nature of norms and how they might differ from personal values and behaviours.
4. Armchair theories about what dimensions will emerge in a particular research project and what they will predict are notoriously prone to go wrong, especially when the research items have not been tested in previous research. Researchers who choose this approach must be ready to accept the fact that the respondents' minds are sometimes likely to produce something quite unexpected that is far from the researchers' conceptualizations.

Conclusions

GLOBE has not improved or disproved Hofstede's model and has not replaced it with a new one. Rather, it has contributed to our understanding of one of Hofstede's dimensions: the individualism versus collectivism dimension. GLOBE has elucidated some of its important facets: in-group cohesiveness and Western order, based on tolerance and respect for all, versus a relative lack of these phenomena.

GLOBE also seems to have contributed to a better understanding of the power distance dimension, although future research is needed in that field.

The remaining dimensions in Hofstede's model have no close equivalents in GLOBE's.

Of all the 18 dimensions proposed by GLOBE, the following are doubtlessly meaningful, in the sense that they have reliable predictive properties with respect to external variables, even if some of them do not capture precisely what GLOBE's authors believed they would: in-group collectivism and uncertainty avoidance practices (a single dimension!); power distance practices; uncertainty avoidance and future orientation norms (a single dimension!); institutional collectivism norms; gender orientation norms; and assertiveness norms. With the exception of assertiveness norms, and perhaps power distance practices, all these dimensions are either variants, or gravitate toward, the individualism–collectivism dimension known from the existing literature. Thus, GLOBE has added only one validated new dimension to the existing panoply: assertiveness norms.

The remaining GLOBE dimensions are of a dubious nature. Their meaningfulness is unclear and there is evidence suggesting that their 'as is' (practices) variants are closer to unfounded national stereotypes than to an objective reality. This is especially true of humane orientation and performance orientation. At present, there is no evidence that these two dimensions can be satisfactorily validated in either of their variants: practices or norms.

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NOTE: A later version of the findings of the GLOBE study edited by House et al., 2004, was published in 2008 and is reviewed in this issue on pages 123–124.

Appendix

Sample items for the GLOBE dimensions (society 'as is' and 'should be'), provided by GLOBE (House et al. 2004)

In-group collectivism (p. 464)

As is:

1. In this society, children take pride in the individual accomplishments of their parents.
2. In this society, parents take pride in the individual accomplishments of their children.

Should be:

1. In this society, children should take pride in the individual accomplishments of their parents.
2. In this society, parents should take pride in the individual accomplishments of their children.

Uncertainty avoidance (p. 619)

As is:

1. In this society, orderliness and consistency are stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.
2. In this society, societal requirements and instructions are spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do.

Should be:

1. I believe that orderliness and consistency should be stressed, even at the expense of experimentation and innovation.
2. I believe that societal requirements and instructions should be spelled out in detail so citizens know what they are expected to do.

Future orientation (p. 302)

As is:

1. In this society, the accepted norm is to: plan for the future/accept the status quo.
2. In this society, people place more emphasis on: solving current problems/planning for the future.

Should be:

1. I believe that the accepted norm in this society should be to: plan for the future/accept the status quo.
2. I believe that people who are successful should: plan ahead/take life events as they occur.

Institutional collectivism (p. 464)

As is:

1. In this society, leaders encourage group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.
2. The economic system in this society is designed to maximize: individual interests/collective interests.

Should be:

1. I believe that, in general, leaders should encourage group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.
2. I believe that the economic system in this society should be designed to maximize: individual interests/collective interests.

Gender egalitarianism (p. 360)

As is:

1. In this society boys are encouraged more than girls to attain a higher education.
2. In this society, who is more likely to serve in a position of high office: men/women?

Should be:

1. I believe that boys should be encouraged to attain a higher education more than girls.
2. I believe that opportunities for leadership should be: more available for men than for women/equally distributed for men and women/more available for women than for men.

Power distance (p. 536)

As is:

1. In this society, followers are expected to: obey their leaders without question/question their leaders when in disagreement
2. In this society, power is: concentrated at the top/shared throughout society.

Should be:

1. I believe that followers should: obey their leaders without question/question their leaders when in disagreement
2. I believe that power should be: concentrated at the top/shared throughout society.

Performance orientation (pp. 246–247)

As is:

In this society, students are encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance.

Should be:

In this society, students should be encouraged to strive for continuously improved performance.

Humane orientation (pp. 571–572)

As is:

1. In this society, people are generally: very concerned about others/not at all concerned about others.
2. In this society, people are generally: very sensitive toward others/not at all sensitive toward others.

Should be:

1. In this society, people should be encouraged to be: very concerned about others/not at all concerned about others.
2. In this society, people should be encouraged to be: very sensitive toward others/not at all sensitive toward others.

Assertiveness (p. 407)

As is:

1. In this society people are generally: assertive/nonassertive.
2. In this society people are generally: tough/tender.

Should be:

1. In this society people should be encouraged to be: assertive/nonassertive.
2. In this society people should be encouraged to be: tough/tender.